New COACHES' GUIDE 2018 TO TRYOUTS

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CHEERLEADER SELECTION

THE ROLES OF THE CHEERLEADER

As the cheerleading coach or advisor, you should strive to select team members who exemplify the five primary roles of being a cheerleader. By fulfilling these roles, your team will be well-rounded and have the ability to impact school spirit in a positive way!

Crowd Leaders:

The title “cheerleader” explains it all, leading the crowd through cheers! Cheerleaders motivate the crowd and rally them to get on their feet and yell. They understand the sports they are cheering for and genuinely support the team. During games, cheerleaders use signs, poms and megs with a combination of skills to communicate with spectators what words to yell and when to yell them!

Spirit Raisers:

Spirit raising is taking the pride that cheerleaders have for their school and spreading it to their fellow students and community members. Whether it means making signs and encouraging their peers to attend the big game, or keeping the energy up during the game, cheerleaders are where the spirit begins.

Ambassadors:

Being a school ambassador within the community is a key part of being a cheerleader. As one of the most visible student athletes, cheerleaders should be friendly, know the facts about their school, set a good example for other students and spread spirit. Cheerleaders represent their alma mater in the truest fashion!

Athletes:

Cheerleading requires strength, endurance and technique to execute the skills used in crowd leading. Stunts, pyramids, jumps and tumbling are also a focus for cheer teams who compete. Cheerleaders should have dedication to improving their skills throughout the year during practice.

Entertainers:

Cheerleaders use crowd leading tactics, spirit and athleticism to entertain the crowd on game day, especially during timeouts and halftime. Through the use of stunts, tumbling, jumps and dance, cheerleaders are an essential part of the in-game entertainment. When the crowd is entertained and enjoying the game, they are more likely to stand up and yell with the cheerleaders when they are needed most!

CHEERLEADING SQUADS

Whether it's your first year coaching or tenth season, deciding how many cheerleaders to select for your team can be challenging. Here are simple explanations on the standard types of cheerleading squads. Coaches should know what kind of cheerleading squad they want and how many team members they are planning to take prior to tryouts.

Type

- **All Girl:** All Girl squads are made up of female cheerleaders only.
- **Coed:** A coed cheerleading squad has one or more males in addition to female teammates.

Skill Level

- **Varsity:** The squad that cheers for varsity sports teams under the school's athletics. This team consists of the all-around best cheerleaders.
- **JV:** The squad that cheers for junior varsity sports teams under the school's athletics. Cheerleaders on this team work on preparing their skills to make the varsity squad next year.

Roster Size

Coaches pick the number of squad members on a variety of factors: Amount of space on the sidelines, crowd size, school size, number of coaches and practice facilities. Some coaches also fill their roster based on the division size for competition:

- **Small:** 5 - 12 members
- **Medium:** 13 - 16 members
- **Large:** 17 - 20 members
- **Super:** 21 - 30 members

Skill Restrictions

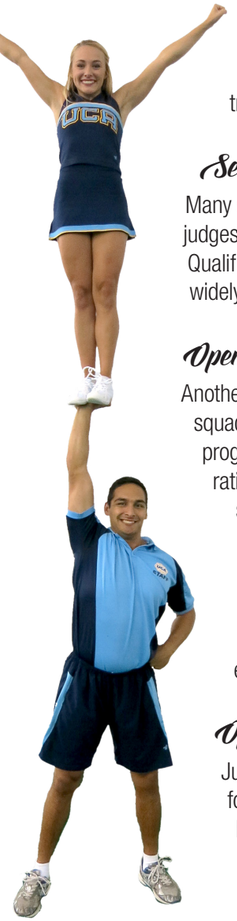
Teams may be limited by skills restrictions held at the state or district level. Check with your UCA State Director to see if this includes your school. Coaches may also choose to eliminate certain skills for their squad on their own.

- **Non Tumbling:** No feet over the head rotation tumbling skills
- **Non Building:** No partner stunts, pyramids, or tosses

New Coaches: Call your UCA State Director for assistance on determining the best squad type for your school.

SELECTION PROCESS

There are different ways to select the cheerleading squad for your school. As the coach/advisor you and your administration must decide which of the options (or combination of options) works best for you. The administration's prior approval of the process will be very important. Think about the roles of the cheerleader, and keep in mind what qualities/skills you seek and make sure you are filling those roles.



Selection by the Cheerleading Coach:

Cheerleading teams can be selected by the coach and/or advisor(s). Similar to football or basketball tryouts, the coaching staff evaluates candidates and selects the squad themselves.

Selection by Qualified Judges:

Many schools opt to hire a panel of qualified judges to evaluate and select the squad. By using qualified judges, a candidate is placed on a squad based on the execution of skills in an unbiased environment. Qualified judges can be professional instructors, such as the UCA Staff. This selection process is the most widely used tryout method. Contact your UCA State Director for a list of qualified judges near you.

Open Squad:

Another option for building a cheerleading program is to allow anyone who wants to participate to be on the squad. This method for selecting cheerleaders can increase student involvement in the school's spirit program. However as the coach, you must be aware of the safety concerns. As the cheerleader to coach ratio increases, proper supervision becomes more difficult. In order to have safe practices, the coaching staff may need to include several coaches to supervise at all times.

Combination:

Another option is to use a combination of methods to fit your school's needs. Example: The coach conducts the interview portion of tryouts and then judges could use a judging sheet to score skill execution. A combination of the coach's interview scores and judge's scores would determine the team.

Open vs. Closed Tryouts:

Judging can be open or closed to the school, depending on your situation. A closed tryout will be easier for the candidates and the judges, while an open tryout will give you an idea of how the candidates handle crowds. All things considered, it is generally better to have a closed tryout.



PREPARING FOR TRYOUTS

NOTIFICATION OF TRYOUTS

After working with the administration on the method of selection for your cheerleading squad, the next step is to let the potential cheerleaders know how to get involved. The key to building a great squad is to start with great candidates.

Announcements

Each announcement should contain the following information:

- **What:** Cheerleading Tryouts!
- **Who:** Who is eligible to tryout for which squad
  The coach's contact information
- **When:** Tryout dates and location
  Pre-tryout meeting information and location
  Clinic dates and location
- **How:** Tryout registration process
  List of requirements
  Paperwork deadlines
- **Why:** Perks of being on the cheer team

Posted Announcements

Several announcements should be posted throughout the school in relevant areas (for instance, do not post in the freshman hall if they are not eligible). Use social media to get the word out and encourage current cheerleaders to help!

Morning Announcements

A brief announcement should be included in the morning or homeroom announcements if possible. This announcement should cover the date, time and location of the first meeting and your name for further information.

PRE-TRYOUT MEETING

This is your chance to explain your expectations for the year to potential cheerleaders and parents. Consider preparing a handout that candidates and parents can follow along with during the meeting and can take home for future reference. Explain the following in detail so all involved can make an informed decision as to whether or not to try out for the squad.

General Program & Safety Goals

- Main goals of your spirit program
- Overall safety plan
- Squad emergency plan

Constitution/Code of Conduct

- Responsibilities of cheer team members
- Consequences of breaking the rules
- GPA minimum
- Missing practices

Tryout Procedures

- Format of tryouts
- Paperwork and deadlines
- Number of squads and size of roster

Time Commitment

- Length of season
- Team practices per week & hours per practice
- Additional skills training
- Game schedules & competition commitments
- Community service requirements
- UCA Summer Camp dates

Approximate Monetary Costs/Fundraising

A worksheet that explains the approximate costs up front will help the parents understand the financial obligations. This will prevent unforeseen problems/expenses later.

- Itemized list of projected costs:
  - Uniforms (tops, shirts, briefs, warm ups, practice wear)
  - Equipment (poms, signs, megs, bags)
  - Camp & Competition
- Fundraising information
- Payment deadlines

SELECTING JUDGES

The key to a successful tryout is having your team selected by qualified individuals. Some coaches feel comfortable selecting their own teams and others utilize judges. Regardless of the format you choose, everything should be approved by your administration prior to the tryout process. If you choose to use outside judges, here is information that will help you select the right judges for you.

Types of Judges

- Coaching Staff
- Professional Judges
  - Universal Cheerleaders Association offers their instructional staff as professional judges. Go to *uca.varsity.com* to find your UCA State Director. They will be happy to provide you with qualified judges in your area, allowing you more time to focus on having the best tryout possible.

Avoid Conflicts of Interest

- The credibility of your tryout process is very important. Ask your judges if they have worked directly with any of the candidates. While there is no way to keep from general contact (games, camp, etc.), any training activities or direct interactions with an individual should be avoided.

Judges' Fees

- The compensation depends on the amount of time they will spend at tryouts and distance traveled.
- Get each judge's personal information and complete their check requests prior to tryouts.
- Plan to give them a check at the tryout rather than mailing it afterward.

Communication with Judges

- Once your judges are secured, send them directions to the tryout location and the date and time you expect them to arrive. Include your phone number in case of any last minute questions.
- It is important to confirm your judges early since demand is high during peak months.

PRE-TRYOUT CLINIC

It is easier for judges to give a consistent score if cheerleaders are performing the same material. In this kit, you'll find the UCA tryout material that fits the skill level of your prospective cheerleaders.

General clinic information

- Use the clinic to teach the tryout material to the candidates.
- Typically lasts 2-3 days.
  - First day should be used for teaching tryout material.
  - The rest of the time should be used for candidates to work with one another on material.
- Allow at least one day in between the clinic and the tryout to give the candidates some time to polish their material.

Assistants

- Have someone learn the material from this kit for the tryouts.
  - For high school, use your graduating seniors for this.
  - This can be divided so that one group learns the cheer and another learns the dance.
  - For middle school, also use your outgoing class or high school cheerleaders from the area.
- Demonstrate their knowledge of the material prior to tryouts.
- Must understand the importance of not teaching or showing material to anyone before the clinic.
- Emphasize that they must help everyone, not just the candidates they know.

Assigning Numbers and Grouping Candidates

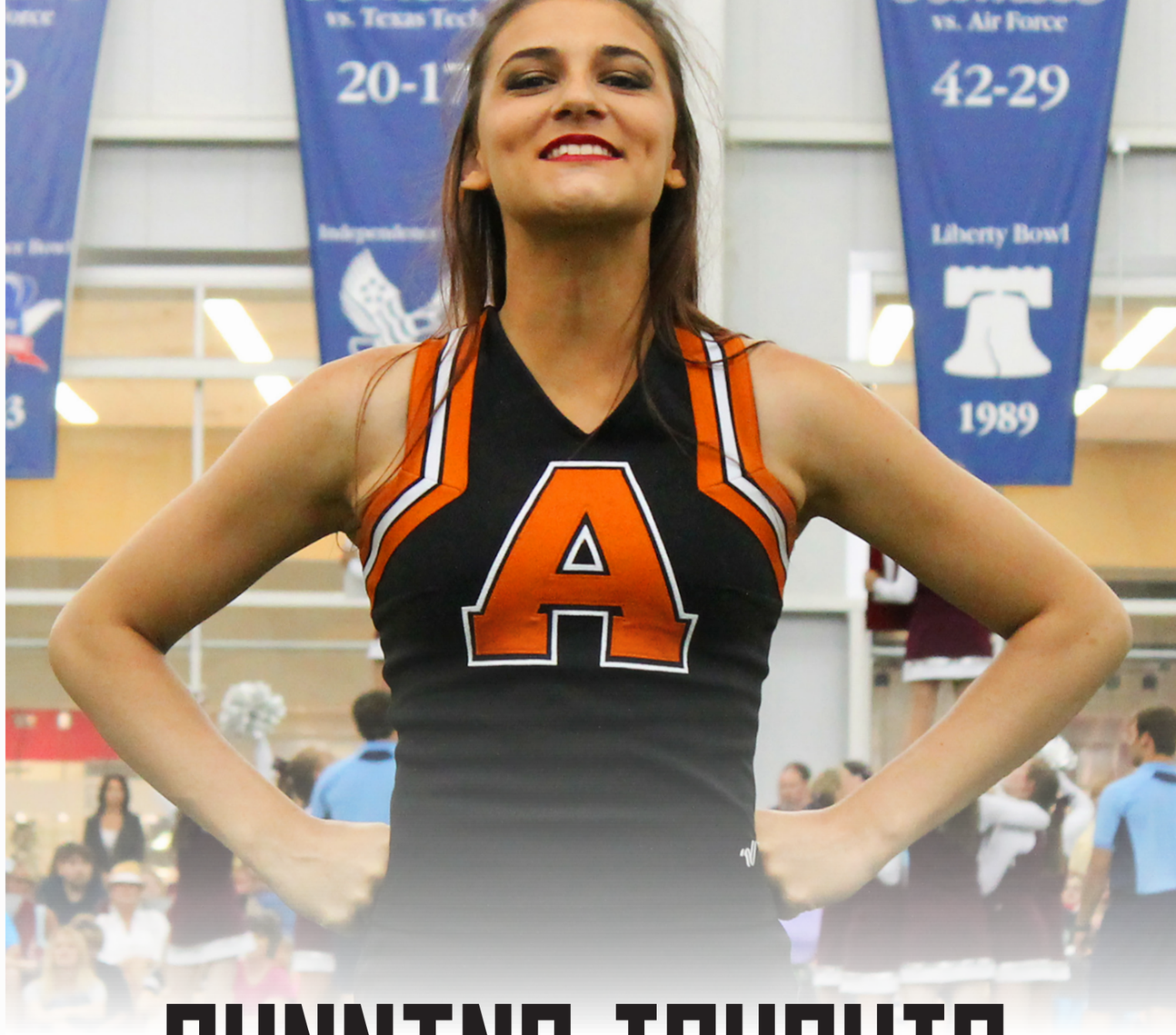
- Have participants draw numbers for their tryout groups on the first day to allow them to meet each other before working together on the second day.
- Write down each candidate's name and corresponding number.
- You could also group them according to stunt groups.

Day 1

- Explain the tryout process and the order material will be performed.
- Have candidates learn the dance first, as it is usually the most difficult to perfect.
  - Assistants should first teach the dance to counts.
  - Once the candidates are comfortable, allow them to practice with the music.
- After learning the dance and the cheer, allow time for candidates to practice on their own.
- If your tryout requires stunts and tumbling, be sure to use mats and progressions.

Day 2 - Day 3

- Conduct a quick material review and then let the groups start working together.
- If you are planning on participating in the judging process, this is a good time to evaluate how well each candidate will work with others.
- Conduct a mock tryout to let the candidates get used to the tryout process.



RUNNING TRYOUTS

RUNNING TRYOUTS

Week of tryouts

- Each judge should be confirmed by phone and email address.
- Remind your administration of the dates and times for the tryout clinic and tryout itself.
- All paperwork must be completed (applications, medical release forms, recommendations, etc.).

Day Before Tryouts

- Confirm that the gym and mats are reserved and ready.
- Tables, chairs, scoresheets, pencils and calculators should all be available for the judges and your score tabulator.

Tryout Day

- Organization
  - Have your assistants run errands.
- Scoresheets
  - You may want someone else to handle the scoresheet tabulation, such as the principal, vice principal or book keeper.
  - Use the recommended sheets in this kit.
- Your assistants should demonstrate the format and material of the tryout to the judges.
- Before tryouts officially begin, have the candidates perform sideline, cheer and dance together as a group.
- Using tape, mark the places on the floor where the candidates should stand during their tryout.
- Conduct the tryout.

Announcing the Team

- Before announcing the new squad:
  - Thank everyone for coming to tryouts.
  - Remind the candidates of common courtesy and sportsmanship.
  - You can post a piece of paper with the candidates' tryout numbers or names, or announce it verbally in the group.
- After announcing the new squad:
  - Share the time of the squad's first practice and/or parents' meeting.
  - Make yourself available after the tryout to speak with candidates that did not make the squad. Be prepared through your own notes or the judges' sheets, to inform the candidates that did not make the squad where they need to improve.

ORDER OF TRYOUTS

1. Have one of your assistants in charge of lining up the candidates.

2. Stage groups of candidates to the side in numerical order.

3. Call out candidate number 1, followed by 2, 3, then 4. They should demonstrate their school spirit as they run to their spots that you have marked with tape.

4. Have the candidates execute their individual skills first. Each person should show their Toe Touch, then each person should show their standing tumbling skills, followed by their running tumbling skills.
   - **Jumps:** Toe Touch
   - **Tumbling** ***(if applicable)*****:** Standing and Running

5. Next, you should move on to group skills. Have one of your assistants call the sideline and cheer to set the pace and tempo for each group.
   - **Sideline**
   - **Cheer**
   - **Dance**
   - **Stunts** ***(if applicable)***

6. Give the judges ample time to decide on their scores, then move on to the next group.

7. Once each group is finished, the scoresheets should go to the tabulator. They should fill in the judges' scores on the master sheet and add them to any other scores (interview scores, teacher evaluations, GPA, etc.).

8. Once all of the candidates are finished, the judges can be dismissed.

9. The candidates can be dismissed or they can wait for the rankings. Scores should be ranked immediately and the new team should be posted or announced in tryout number order.



TRYOUT SCORING

SCORESHEETS

Once you know the type of cheerleading squad you want to have, use one of the scoresheets available in this kit. You can edit where you need to and then print for your tryouts.

TRADITIONAL SCORESHEETS

SCORESHEETS WITH STUNTS AND TUMBLING

MASTER SCORESHEETS

AND MORE...

Edit and print additional forms needed for your tryout. Here are some of the forms available for you to use:

TRYOUT APPLICATION

TEACHER RECOMMENDATION

JUDGES' INFORMATION

PARENT INFORMATION

COACHES' CHECKLIST

HOW TO SCORE - SKILLS



Crowd Leading:

Look for cheerleaders that are comfortable in front of a crowd, can use their voice/props to get the crowd to yell and are familiar with the sports they cheer for (know when/what to yell at appropriate times in the game). Crowd leading is what being a cheerleader is all about! This should be the first thing you look for when selecting your squad.

Motions:

When judging motions, look at how sharp each candidate's motions are and their motion placement. They should be hitting their motions hard, rather than simply placing them. Pay attention to arm placement (a Right Punch should have the right arm directly next to the head and the left arm should be in a fist on the hip). Also, the wrists should create a straight line all the way to the knuckles, rather than breaking backwards or forwards.

Tumbling:

Based on your squad's ability level, it is up to you as a coach to decide how to score tumbling. Some squads consider it bonus points, while others require skills such as a Standing Back Handspring or Back Tuck to make a certain squad. Tumbling requirements are common among competitive squads. Judges should reward cheerleaders for above average technique, such as straight legs in Back Handsprings and solid landings (meaning feet are together and don't move after the skill is complete).



Jumps:

Consider having candidates perform a Toe Touch along with a jump of their choice. They should be rewarded for height, pointed toes, arm placement, keeping their chest upright and landing. During your tryout clinic, have your assistants demonstrate your preferred approach to jumps. If you do not have a set approach, have cheerleaders hit a High V on 1 2, swing on 3, hit the jump on 4, land on 5 6 and stand on 7 8.

Stunting:

Some tryouts require cheerleaders to demonstrate stunting skills. For All Girl teams, you may have stunt groups try out together and demonstrate predetermined stunts. Bases should use their legs and shrug up during stunts, while keeping their feet planted. Backspots should control the stunt, pull up on the top girl's ankles and keep their feet planted throughout. Top girls should stay tight in the air and demonstrate flexibility in single-leg stunts (if your squad is at that level). For Coed teams, males should work toward unassisted stunts such as Chairs, Hands, Extensions and above, or work with a second base to assist them to the stunts.

Dance:

When judging the dance, the most important things to look for are knowledge and comfort level of the dance, rhythm and motion placement. How well do they know the dance, and do they look ready to perform it in front of a crowd? Reward them for hitting their motions on the right count and keeping the dance sharp. If a cheerleader makes an error, pay close attention to how they recover. Cheerleaders should be rewarded if they can perform the dance error-free or are able to jump back in after a mistake.



Game Day Presence:

This requires that those cheerleaders trying out reflect the team image. Candidates should look their best for the tryout, as they would for a game or competition. This includes wearing school colors, keeping hair tied back and out of the face and wearing a bow If the team has a traditional style (tucked in shirts, a specific hairstyle, etc.), those trying out should look the part. Game day presence also considers the manner in which the candidates present themselves. Those trying out should always have a smile on their face, looking excited to cheer and represent their school. Cheerleaders should be a positive ambassador for the team or school they are representing at all times.

Recommendation Letters:

This is an important part of the tryout, since it assesses the prospective cheerleader's behavior and character. Decide how many recommendation letters you will require from each candidate. It is a good idea to require that each recommendation come from the candidate's current teachers. Being an ambassador is a large part of being a cheerleader, and the teacher recommendations will give you a good idea of how a cheerleader will represent your squad and school. Have teachers turn in recommendations either directly to you or by sealed envelope.

GPA:

It's important that students trying out for the team understand the importance of educational responsibility from the beginning of the tryout process. Being a part of the squad will require more time committed to various practices, games, competitions and events. Check with your athletic director to see if there is a minimum GPA students must uphold while participating on the team.

Interview:

In addition to the recommendations, interviews are a great way to asses a prospective cheerleader's character. As ambassadors in their community, they are expected to interact with those around them and represent their school in a professional manner. Interviewing each candidate will help you gauge how they will act in their community and will help you get to know them prior to selecting your team.

Prospective Male Cheerleaders:

Males can be a great asset to any team! However, when you have one or more at your tryout, take a step back and make sure they are the right fit for your squad. Males should still be able to demonstrate crowd leading abilities (consider having them use a megaphone), motions, group and coed stunting, tumbling and should demonstrate extraordinary character. Depending on each school's traditions, males are often not required to dance so they may focus more on crowd leading and skills. Since many trying out are new to cheerleading, pay close attention to them during the entire tryout process and gauge their potential to be an asset to the team.







SAFETY

CHEERLEADING SAFETY

During tryouts and after you select your team, it's important to keep safety the top priority. At UCA camp you will learn a comprehensive program designed to help you minimize the risk of injury to your cheerleaders. All parts of this curriculum are important, and we recommend that you implement this program in its entirety.

We also recommend that you become familiar with the information contained in the AACCA Safety Manual. For the most up-to-date AACCA Safety Rules and Guidelines and/or to order a manual, visit *aacca.org*.

The Advisor's Role in Safety

The cheerleading advisor/coach is responsible for the safety of the cheerleaders. Here are some important points to remember when working with your squad:

- Constant Supervision:

  The advisor/coach should be present at all cheerleading practices and make sure the cheerleaders are aware of the safety rules and are abiding by them. It is especially important to know what skills are legal on certain surfaces. Remember, as a coach, you are always responsible for the safety of your squad members. No coach means no practice!

- Setting parameters/establishing ability levels:

  The safety guidelines available at *aacca.org* set broad parameters for cheerleading activities. The advisor/coach must constantly evaluate his/her squad members to make sure they're participating in activities within their ability level. Use stunt progressions to determine the level and speed that your squad progresses throughout the year. Be sure to create a dialogue between you and your squad. Ask athletes questions to ensure that everyone is mentally and physically ready, and that athletes feel comfortable with the skills they are trying.

- Stay current:

  Advisors/coaches should remain current on all new techniques and safety regulations. If there are questions, a knowledgeable cheerleading expert should be contacted. UCA recommends that the advisor/coach be familiar with the safety procedures discussed in the AACCA Cheerleading Safety Manual.

EMERGENCY PLAN

Like a fire drill, an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) is best when planned, practiced and never used. But like a fire drill, it must be planned and practiced in the event that it does need to be used. Action in an emergency situation should be deliberate and automatic.

Plan Ahead

Assume an injury or medical emergency has just occurred at your practice. What steps do you need to take to get the proper medical attention to the individual as fast as possible? What personnel is available to complete the necessary tasks?

- You or someone that is always with the team should have training in basic first aid and CPR. If you have access to an AED, get training in its proper use. Some teams have every member complete this training!
- Stay with the injured person to apply any needed first aid and to supervise their well-being.
- Assign two mature people to call 9-1-1 with a script that contains the school address and location of the practice or game.
- Assign groups of at least two to create a path to meet emergency personnel outside of the building and to direct them to the point of the emergency. This may mean groups at the gym door, farther down the hallway at a corner, standing at the exit doors and standing in the parking lot to meet them.
- Assign additional groups to get the medical release forms and to keep non-faculty individuals from entering the gym or the area of the emergency. If available, contact the school nurse or athletic trainer.
- Instruct all others on the team that they are responsible for keeping the immediate area of the emergency clear.
- Be prepared to contact the individual's parents/guardians with pertinent information, followed by a phone call to your supervisor (principal, athletic director or gym owner).

The American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA) has developed a sample EAP along with video and downloadable forms. This information is available at ***aacca.org/eap.***

EMERGENCY PLAN

Practice

- Practice all parts of the plan (with the exception of dialing 9-1-1) to ensure that there are no unforeseen obstacles to obtaining fast emergency care. Continue making any necessary modifications and practice until you are confident that everyone knows his/her responsibilities.
- Like a fire drill, practice the plan periodically to keep it top-of-mind. AACCA recommends the first practice of the month become a scheduled rehearsal of the Emergency Plan.

Take Action

- In the event an incident occurs that you determine requires emergency care, stay calm and instruct everyone to enact the Emergency Plan, to take their positions and to understand that this is not a drill.
- Inform those individuals assigned to call 9-1-1 as to the nature of the injury so they can relay that to the 9-1-1 operator.
- Apply any needed first aid.
- If the emergency requires transportation, find out where they are going and inform the parents or guardians that you will meet them there once the rest of the team is properly supervised.
- Never leave the team unsupervised to ride with the ambulance.

Online Documents

- The AACCA website contains documentation for you to use to develop your EAP, including sample information cards and phone scripts.
- AACCA also has developed a new flipchart version of the EAP for use with a clipboard that gives easy access to the assignments and 9-1-1-phone script. Visit *aacca.org/eap* for more information.

Develop your EAP with the help of your school nurse, athletic trainer or other sports medicine professional. Consider emergency plans for weather emergencies as well as potential indoor emergencies such as a hazardous chemical spill (cleaning solutions or bleach, for example).